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# The Dynastic Crisis 1497–1502

J. L. I. FENNELL

## I

AT the end of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th century there occurred in Moscow a series of events to which most historians give the label 'dynastic crisis'. That it was, to start with at any rate, a dynastic crisis seems to be the only point of agreement among all historians. The interpretation of what few facts we have has been so variegated that it is not uncommon to find that one historian's deductions are diametrically opposed to those of another. The trouble is that the sources, for the most part strictly censored during the reigns of Vasily III and Ivan IV, only hint darkly at what happened. Annoying though this is, it is hardly surprising when one considers that Vasily III was himself deeply concerned in the crisis. We are left to piece the fragments together and to find an explanation for what seems to be a jumble of disconnected facts. The purpose of this essay is to set out all the available evidence, to examine briefly the views of serious investigators of the problem and to attempt a re-appraisal of the events of 1497–1502.

The crisis can be said to have started in 1490 when Ivan III's eldest son, the husband of Yelena Stepanovna, died. Born in 1458 of Ivan's first wife, Ivan Ivanovich had from an early age been treated by his father as heir-apparent to the throne and co-ruler. Already in 1471 the chronicles refer to him as 'Grand Prince Ivan Ivanovich', a title probably granted him by decree of his father, for there is no record of an official coronation. Apart from a vague report by the Italian traveller Contarini, who visited Moscow in 1476–7, to the effect that Ivan Ivanovich at that time 'was not in great favour on account of his bad conduct',<sup>1</sup> there is nothing to show that the relationship between father and son was at any time strained. Indeed Ivan the Young, as he was known to contemporaries, occupied precisely the position in military and administrative affairs one would have expected from the heir and co-ruler, remaining behind in the capital while his father busied himself with Novgorod, actively defending the Oka in 1480 and being rewarded for his services in 1485 with the former grand principality of Tver'. On 7 March 1490 he died of gout, having been ineptly treated by one Magister Leon, a Jewish doctor from Venice, who was later executed for his error. It would be tempting to believe that Sofia Palaeologa was in some way responsible for her stepson's death; but there is nothing but the most

<sup>1</sup> Ambrogio Contarini, *Travels to Tana and Persia by Josafa Barbaro and Ambrogio Contarini*, London, Hakluyt Society, 1873, p. 163.

circumstantial of evidence to show that she was in any way implicated.<sup>2</sup> There can be little doubt, however, that she was glad to see him out of the way, for only by his death would one of her sons stand a chance of acceding to the throne.

The problem arose as to who would now be nominated heir. There were no more sons by Ivan's first marriage. Sofia, however, had already produced five, the eldest of whom, Vasily, was nearly eleven, and she was four months pregnant with her sixth son. Ivan Ivanovich, on the other hand, had left a six-and-a-half year old son, Dmitry. According to the practice and tradition of the house of Daniel, the princes of Moscow left their thrones to their eldest sons. But never yet had an eldest son with male issue predeceased his father and there was therefore no precedent for choosing between the son of the deceased heir and the eldest surviving son of the reigning prince. The choice between Dmitry and Vasily rested entirely with Ivan III himself.

No move was made by Ivan or by either of the two mothers for seven years. Evidently some sort of *modus vivendi* was agreed upon pending the ultimate decision of the grand prince; or, at any rate, if there was dissension within the family, the outer world was not allowed to hear of it. Sofia and her children, Yelena and her son continued to live together in the palace of the grand prince.<sup>3</sup> No hint was dropped as to Ivan's choice of successor. The chroniclers refer to all his progeny alike merely as 'princes'. In diplomatic exchanges with Lithuania every effort was made to keep the Lithuanian foreign office in the dark as to who had precedence, Vasily or Dmitry. No possible conclusions could be drawn from the order in which the greetings of the various members of the grand prince's family were transmitted to Alexander and, later, to his wife.<sup>4</sup> Even if Sofia had been in disfavour during the 1490s it is most unlikely that Ivan would have advertised the fact by omitting her name in despatches

<sup>2</sup> Viz. the remark made some eighty years later by A. M. Kurbsky, highly prejudiced against Sofia, that she *and Ivan III* (!) 'had destroyed . . . with death-bringing poison . . . Ioann.' Kurbsky, 'Istoriya Knyazya Velikogo Moskovskogo' (*Russkaya istoricheskaya biblioteka* (abbr. *R.I.B.*), vol. 3, St. Petersburg, 1914, col. 272-3). Such a rumour may have been started because Leon had been brought to Moscow in the winter of 1489-90 by Sofia's brother Andrey.

<sup>3</sup> In 1492 Sofia and her children, Yelena and Dmitry, all moved with the grand prince to Prince Ivan Yur'evich Patrikeyev's palace while his own wooden palace was being replaced by a stone one. See *Polnoye sobraniye russkikh letopisey* (abbr. *P.S.R.L.*), vol. VIII, p. 224.

<sup>4</sup> The normal order was: Ivan III; Sofia; Yelena Stepanovna; Sofia's three sons—Vasily, Yury and Dmitry; Yelena's son—Dmitry. The practice was, however, as follows: first the senior member of the Muscovite delegation conveyed the greetings of the grand prince; then the second in seniority conveyed the greetings of Sofia's three sons; finally the senior member conveyed the greetings of Yelena's son Dmitry (see *Sbornik imperatorskogo russkogo istoricheskogo obschestva* (abbr. *S.R.I.O.*), vol. 35, pp. 138, 164, 205). Sofia and Yelena Stepanovna were either mentioned by the second in seniority before Sofia's sons (*ibid.*, pp. 138, 164) or by the senior member immediately after the grand prince (p. 205). Note that Yelena Stepanovna is not mentioned before 1495 in the lists of *poklony*.

sent to Vilna; for at that time he had every reason to present to west Russian eyes a picture of harmony and concord within the Kremlin. Alexander's Ruthenian subjects would not be attracted to serve a sovereign whose closest relations were in disgrace or disfavour, especially if one of those relations happened to be Sofia; for her presence in Moscow could only be an attraction to would-be defectors who perhaps sympathised with, or were members of, the uniatic church. In any case there is evidence that Sofia was not in disfavour, at least in the early part of the 1490s; for her son Vasily, then eleven years old, appears to have been given nominal control of Tver' after Ivan Ivanovich's death.<sup>5</sup>

The crisis broke in 1497. Most of the chronicle accounts of the incidents of the winter of 1497-8 are bare and disappointing: clearly they were pruned by careful censorship during Vasily III's reign, all details unfavourable to Vasily being removed. In one chronicle fragment, however, which was written at the end of Ivan III's life and which evidently escaped official notice during subsequent reigns, we find an unbiassed and reasonably detailed account of what happened.<sup>6</sup> It in no way contradicts the other accounts—it merely fills in the details and gives the motives underlying many of the events. The facts, as far as can be judged by piecing together all available information, are as follows: some time before the end of 1497, probably in the late summer, a certain *d'yak* by the name of Fyodor Stromilov informed Vasily—and no doubt his mother too—that the grand prince was about to appoint his grandson Dmitry 'grand prince of Vladimir and Moscow'. Around Vasily a conspiracy was formed. The chief conspirator, according to the chronicle fragment, was 'that second forerunner of Satan, Afanasy Ropchenok', who together with Stromilov, 'Poyarok the brother of Runo' and 'other boyars' sons' urged Vasily to 'depart' from his father. To assist in this act of treachery yet more 'boyars' sons' were admitted to the conspiracy and 'led in secret to take the oath'. It was planned that Vasily should 'plunder the grand prince's treasury in Vologda and Beloozero' and 'commit treason against Prince Dmitry the grandson'. In other words, Vasily was to disassociate himself from the central authority of Ivan III and his new heir, to seize all official funds deposited in the

<sup>5</sup> On the back of a *zhalovannaya gramota* issued by Ivan Ivanovich in 1486 granting the White Lake monastery of St Cyril free right of passage for a ship and three carts across Tver' territory, there is a confirmatory note added in 'the year [69]99' (i.e. between 1 September 1490 and 1 September 1491) and authoritatively issued in the name of 'Prince Vasily Ivanovich'. *Akty sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoy istorii severo-vostochnoy Rusi kontsa XIV-nachala XVI v.* (abbr. *A.S.E.I.*), A.N. S.S.S.R., Moscow, vol. II, no. 271.

<sup>6</sup> See *P.S.R.L.*, VI, p. 279; XII, p. 263; N. A. Kazakova and Ya. S. Lur'e, *Antifeodal'-nyye yereticheskiye dvizheniya na Rusi XIV-nachala XVI veka*, A.N. S.S.S.R., 1955, p. 165; Ya. S. Lur'e, 'Pervyye ideologi Moskovskogo Samoderzhaviya (Sofiya Paleolog i eyo protivniki)' (*Uchonyye zapiski Leningradskogo gosudarstvennogo pedagogicheskogo instituta im. A. I. Gertsena*, Leningrad, vol. 78, 1948, p. 96).

northern provinces of Vologda and Beloozero and there to set up an independent centre of rebellion and resistance. The plot was discovered by the grand prince before the conspirators could do anything. Vasily was placed under house arrest. On 27 December 1497 six of the conspirators were beheaded on the ice of the Moskva river; others were imprisoned. At the same time Sofia was put in *opala* or disgrace; according to the uncensored account, it was discovered that 'women were coming to her with [poisonous] herbs'—presumably they were to have murdered Dmitry. After interrogation Ivan had 'these evil women executed, drowned by night in the Moskva river'. 'From that time on', the chronicler concludes, 'he began to live with her in great vigilance'.<sup>7</sup> At some time or other between the discovery of the plot and the execution of the plotters Ivan consulted Metropolitan Simon, summoned a church council and evidently referred to it the case against the conspirators—possibly, too, against his wife and son.<sup>8</sup>

Just over a month after the execution of the chief conspirators Ivan demonstratively showed his subjects—and, more especially, the outside world—where his sympathies lay. Dmitry, his grandson, was crowned grand prince of Vladimir, Moscow and All Russia on 4 February 1498. The ceremony was performed by the metropolitan in the cathedral of the Assumption. All the bishops, with the conspicuous exception of Gennady of Novgorod and Filofey of Perm', were present; so were the sons of the grand prince—all, that is, except the disgraced Vasily: his place was taken by the second eldest son Yury, who at the conclusion of the service thrice sprinkled his nephew with gold and silver coins in front of each of the three great cathedrals of the Kremlin. Ivan in his opening address to the metropolitan said that it was the custom of the grand princes of Moscow to bestow the grand principality on the eldest of their sons; this he had done to his eldest son. 'But now by God's will,' he went on, 'my son Ivan has departed this life; his first son Dmitry has remained alive, and now, for my lifetime and for after my life, I bless him with the grand principality of Vladimir, Moscow and Novgorod.' After blessing the regalia—the cap of Monomakh and the great collar (*barmy*)—the metropolitan handed them to Ivan who put them on Dmitry.<sup>9</sup> Yelena's

<sup>7</sup> *P.S.R.L.*, VI, p. 279; XII, p. 263. For a brief (censored) account of the discovery of the plot and the execution of the plotters, see *P.S.R.L.*, VI, p. 43; VIII, p. 234; XII, p. 246.

<sup>8</sup> This evidence is only found in *P.S.R.L.*, XXII, p. 513. Cf. L. V. Cherepnin, *Russkiye feodal'nyye arkhivy XIV–XV vekov*, A.N. S.S.S.R., Moscow, 1951, part II, pp. 302–3; S. B. Veselovsky, 'Vladimir Gusev—sostavitel' sudebnika 1497 goda' (*Istoricheskiye zapiski*, no. 5, Moscow, 1939, pp. 46–7). It seems not improbable that the church council, the majority of whose members must have sympathised rather with Sofia than with the heretical Yelena, strongly advocated leniency in the grand prince's treatment of his wife and son.

<sup>9</sup> See *P.S.R.L.*, VIII, pp. 234–6. The same account is found in all the chronicles.

son, it seemed, was assured of his grandfather's throne. For Yelena Stepanovna it was her greatest moment of triumph: her enemy Sofia was in disgrace; her son's only rival was under house arrest. The first phase of the dynastic crisis could hardly have ended more satisfactorily for her.

For a year all appears to have been calm on the surface. The sources, intentionally perhaps, avoid all mention of the main protagonists in the conflict at court. If Vasily and Sofia still remained in disgrace in Moscow, Ivan was determined that the outside world should not hear of it; the three ambassadors despatched to Vilna in 1498 were each instructed to convey Sofia's greetings to Alexander, and on one occasion when all the grand prince's sons were mentioned, Vasily's name figured with the rest, albeit after those of Dmitry, Sofia and Yelena.<sup>10</sup> In the beginning of 1499, however, the crisis took a new turn. In January Ivan arrested his first cousin, Prince Ivan Yur'evich Patrikeyev, foremost boyar and statesman, governor (*namestnik*) of Moscow, close adviser of the grand prince and president of the boyar council. With him were arrested two of his sons, Vasily (nicknamed *kosoy*, the squinter) and Ivan Mynin Patrikeyev, as well as his son-in-law Prince Semyon Ivanovich Ryapolovsky.<sup>11</sup> Only one source mentions their crime directly—'treason'.<sup>12</sup> The remainder merely report the arrest without comment. All four princes were sentenced to death. Ryapolovsky was beheaded on the Moskva river on 5 February. The Patrikeyevs, however, were saved from death by the intervention of the senior clergy: 'thanks to the intercession of Metropolitan Simon, the archbishop [Gennady of Novgorod or Tikhon of Rostov?] and the bishops, he [Ivan III] bestowed his favour upon Prince Ivan Yur'evich [Patrikeyev] and did not commit him to execution, but had him and his son Vasily take the tonsure.'<sup>13</sup> Ivan Yur'evich was made to join the brethren of the Trinity monastery; Vasily was sent to the White Lake monastery of St Cyril (in Beloozero);<sup>14</sup> the other son, Ivan Mynin, was placed under house arrest.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See *S.R.I.O.*, vol. 35, pp. 244, 250, 261.

<sup>11</sup> See *P.S.R.L.*, VIII, p. 236, and all other chronicles under 1499 for news of the arrest.

<sup>12</sup> The chronicle of Ustyug. See *Ustyuzhskiy letopisnyy svod* (abbr. *U.L.*), A.N. S.S.S.R., 1950, p. 100.

<sup>13</sup> See the chronicle fragment mentioned above, *P.S.R.L.*, XII, p. 264. See also the *Vladimirskiy letopisets* under 1499, the only other source to mention the intervention of the clergy: M. N. Tikhomirov, 'Iz "Vladimirskogo letopista"' (*Istoricheskiye zapiski*, no. 15, Moscow, 1945, p. 291).

<sup>14</sup> See *P.S.R.L.*, VIII, p. 236.

<sup>15</sup> See *P.S.R.L.*, XII, p. 264. Bazilevich and Cherepnin consider that Afanasy Patrikeyev, whose lands were at some time confiscated, was also arrested with the other Patrikeyevs. It is not known what his relationship with Ivan Yur'evich was. See K. V. Bazilevich, *Vneshnyaya politika russkogo tsentralizovannogo gosudarstva vtoraya polovina XV veka*, Moscow, 1952, p. 370, note 2; 'Novgorodskiy pomeschchiki iz posluzhil'tsev v kontse XV v.' (*Istoricheskiye zapiski*, no. 14, Moscow, 1945, p. 70); Cherepnin, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 307.



On 21 March Ivan publicly forgave his son Vasily (*vina yemu ot dal*),<sup>16</sup> gave him the title of 'sovereign grand prince' and appointed him grand prince of Novgorod and Pskov, an appointment which, though it apparently deprived Dmitry of one of his 'grand principalities', in no way lessened the latter's authority as 'grand prince of All Russia', co-ruler and heir to the throne. The arrests went on. In April of the same year Prince Vasily Vasil'evich Romodanovsky, a relative of Ryapolovsky and a diplomat of some standing, was arrested together with a certain Andrey Korobov of Tver'.<sup>17</sup> Their fate is unknown. Others too were probably rounded up at the same time—we know that at some time before the end of the century several Muscovite boyars, some of whom were connected in one way or another with those arrested in 1497 and 1499, had their estates confiscated.<sup>18</sup>

The arrests of the boyars in 1499 may or may not have been connected with the dynastic conflict—only the unreliable and tendentious *Stepennaya kniga* links the two events.<sup>19</sup> In any case it would appear that there were no publicly manifested reactions to the punishments either in Lithuania, where the Patrikeyevs, Ryapolovsky and Romodanovsky were well known, or in Moscow; if there were any, they were carefully concealed by the chroniclers. The strange appointment of Vasily, however, caused some resentment in Pskov. The Pskovites, who were still technically independent of the grand prince of Moscow, though none the less his most obsequious of servants, were alarmed at the news. Realising that the appointment would be to their detriment, they despatched a delegation to Moscow requesting that whoever was grand prince in Moscow should be sovereign of Pskov. To their surprise they were soundly rebuked by Ivan III, who was furious that the servile Pskovites should question his political decisions. 'Am I not free to choose between my grandson and my children?' he asked them. 'To whomsoever I please will I grant the right to rule'. For their pains the Pskovites were obliged to return home, leaving behind two members of their delegation in a Moscow jail. At the same time Archbishop Gennady, delighted no doubt at the pardon granted to Vasily and Sofia, arrived in Pskov which, it must be remembered, was part of his see, and proposed to officiate at a thanksgiving service. The Pskovites, however, forbade

<sup>16</sup> *P.S.R.L.*, XII, p. 264. Only in this chronicle fragment is the forgiveness of Vasily's 'guilt' mentioned. All the other official chronicles, censored during the reign of Vasily himself, merely state that Ivan called Vasily grand prince and sovereign and made him grand prince of Novgorod and Pskov.

<sup>17</sup> See N. M. Karamzin, *Istoriya gosudarstva rossiyskogo*, vol. VI, note 451.

<sup>18</sup> See Bazilevich, 'Novgorodskiy pomeschiki . . .', pp. 70–2; *Vneshnyaya politika . . .*, pp. 358 sq.

<sup>19</sup> In the *Stepennaya kniga*, written at a much later date and after the second disgrace of Vasily (or Vassian, as he was known after his tonsure) Patrikeyev (1531), the execution of Ryapolovsky is linked directly with the dynastic events of 1497–9. After the arrests Ivan began 'to have no care for his grandson'. See *P.S.R.L.*, XXI, p. 572.

him to 'pray God for the grand prince Vasily'.<sup>20</sup> The men of Pskov, who wanted no other prince but Dmitry or his grandfather as suzerain, were in no mood to put up with their archbishop's political leanings or to witness any manifestation of his sympathy for the 'Roman' and her son.

Vasily's position was, to say the least, equivocal. Dmitry was in no way worse off than before, in spite of the fact that he now appeared to share the title of grand prince of Novgorod with his uncle. Even if we accept the doubtful evidence of the *Stepennaya kniga* to the effect that Ivan 'ceased to care' for his grandson after the events of the early spring of 1499, there is nothing to show that Dmitry's authority was to any degree lessened. The only ones who can have been—and clearly were—disconcerted by the events of the last three years of the century were Sofia and Vasily. The granting of the title of grand prince of Novgorod and Pskov meant very little in terms of power and nothing in terms of the future. Even if the liquidation of the senior boyars was closely connected with the 'pardon' of Vasily, there is, as will be seen later, no evidence to show that the boyars in question were any more on the side of Yelena and Dmitry than on the side of Sofia and Vasily. Indeed their elimination may have been looked upon by Sofia and her son as a severe political setback, a loss of valuable support in high places.

Perhaps the most eloquent indication of Vasily's dissatisfaction with the political situation in 1499 and with the sop offered him by his father is the fact that he once again planned 'departure' and not only planned it, but executed it, albeit partially. Unfortunately this, the most daring and treasonable of all Vasily's actions, is only mentioned laconically and confusingly in an entry in an unpublished chronicle first brought to light by Ya. S. Lur'e in 1948, certainly unknown to previous historians and seemingly neglected by all subsequent ones.<sup>21</sup> This entry, taken from a short chronicle dating from the beginning of the 16th century, describes Vasily's flight under the year 7008 (i.e. between 1 September 1499 and 1 September 1500):

Prince Vasily, the son of the grand prince Ivan, desiring the grand principality . . . fled himself to Vyaz'ma with his advisers. And the grand prince began to take council with Princess Sofia and brought him back. . . .<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Pskovskiy letopisi*, vol. 1, ed. A. Nasonov, Moscow-Leningrad, 1941, pp. 83-4.

<sup>21</sup> Neither Bazilevich nor Cherepnin nor Zimin appears to have taken notice of it, or even to have mentioned it. The same applies to Vernadsky, who, however, refers to an earlier article by Lur'e of 1941 (not 1940 as he states). See G. Vernadsky, *Russia at the Dawn of the Modern Age*, New Haven, Conn., 1959, pp. 105, 313.

<sup>22</sup> See Ya. S. Lur'e, 'Pervyye ideologi . . .', pp. 99-100; Kazakova and Lur'e, *op. cit.*, pp. 204-5. Between the words 'grand principality . . .' and ' . . . fled himself' is an incomprehensible clause: 'wishing to lay it waste [?] *istraviti* on Svinskoye field near Samsov Wood.' Samsov Wood may be connected with 'Samsonov Meadow' in the Moscow district, a place often mentioned in the wills of the grand princes.



The chronology is confused by the fact that the words 'brought him back' are followed by '. . . and gave him the grand principality and seized Prince Dmitry and his mother Princess Yelena'; for we know that Dmitry and Yelena were not arrested until April 1502. Even the year '7008' is too vague a date to be of much use, for so many momentous events occurred between September 1499 and September 1500—the defection of the west Russian princes, the secularisation of Novgorod church property, the declaration of war on Lithuania and the attempts of Stephen of Moldavia to keep the peace—that it is impossible to gauge the true significance of Vasily's flight unless we know exactly when it took place. Was it connected with the reverse defection of Bel'sky, Mozhaysky and Shemyachich? Did these princes agree to enter Muscovite service only after Vasily had been 'brought back' from Vyaz'ma and fully restored to favour? Did Vasily decide to desert on the eve of the declaration of war on Lithuania, just as Ivan's brothers had 'departed' on the eve of Ahmed's invasion, choosing the most embarrassing moment for the grand prince? All these and many other questions cannot, unfortunately, be answered for lack of precise information. Judging from the known facts and from the wording of the chronicle entry, we can only say that the defection of Vasily, whenever it may have taken place, was planned to embarrass Ivan, was envisaged as a serious rebellion (Vasily, it will be remembered, fled 'with his advisers' to Vyaz'ma, until recently Lithuanian territory and now on the border between the two states) and was caused by Vasily's grave dissatisfaction with the political situation in the Kremlin.

Vasily's treason marked the turning point in the struggle between the two factions at court. After his return to Moscow Vasily was not only fully pardoned but also liberally rewarded for his efforts, just as twenty years earlier his uncle Andrey had been after his rebellion. In March 1501 he had already assumed the title of grand prince and had evidently been granted Beloozero as his estate or as part of his estate; for in that month we find 'Grand Prince Vasily Ivanovich' writing 'to our patrimony of Beloozero'.<sup>23</sup> But his triumph was not yet complete, for Dmitry still remained, in name at least, grand prince of Vladimir and Moscow. He did not remain so for long. On 11 April 1502, just over four years after his coronation, Dmitry was arrested together with his mother. On that day, the chronicler narrates,

<sup>23</sup> *A.S.E.I.*, vol. II, no. 305, pp. 260–1. Vasily was possibly given the title even earlier. In February 1501 the Lithuanian ambassadors to Moscow conveyed Alexander's greetings to 'Grand Prince Vasily', Princes Yury, Dmitry and Semyon, and to the grandson of Ivan, 'Grand Prince Dmitry'. As the ambassadors' credentials were issued in Vilna in December 1500, it may be that Vasily was already grand prince then. See *S.R.I.O.*, vol. 35, pp. 310, 325. The Ustyug chronicle dates the granting of Vasily's title 1500; but then it also states that in that year Dmitry was imprisoned and Yelena died. See *U.L.*, p. 101.

Grand Prince Ivan placed *opala* [disgrace] upon his grandson Grand Prince Dmitry and upon his [Dmitry's] mother Yelena; and from that day onwards he forbade their names to be mentioned in prayers and litanies and forbade him to be called grand prince; and he placed them behind guards.

Three days later Vasily was officially blessed by his father, given the title of 'autocrat of All Russia' and, with the sanction of Metropolitan Simon, 'placed upon the throne of Vladimir and Moscow'.<sup>24</sup> The dynastic crisis was over. There were now no obstacles in Vasily's way. Two years later Yelena died—according to one source she was murdered.<sup>25</sup> Dmitry died in prison in 1509; his death, too, it seems, was a violent one.<sup>26</sup>

## II

Such are the facts relating to the dynastic crisis as far as we know them. On the face of it it would seem that their interpretation is quite simple. Indeed, until recently historians have found no difficulty in making the facts fit straightforward and satisfying theories. Assuming on the evidence of Herberstein, Beklemishev and Kurbsky, all three, be it noted, either prejudiced or unreliable or both, that Sofia Palaeologa was the enemy of the boyars and thus, by implication, the supporter of the new service nobility, most pre-revolutionary and some Soviet historians automatically placed Yelena and Dmitry in the opposite camp. Supporting their theories with the irresponsible dicta of Kurbsky, they made Yelena and Dmitry figureheads of the boyar opposition to the grand prince, the royal representatives of a party headed by such distinguished aristocrats as the Patrikeyevs and Ryapolovsky. Thus the conspiracy of 1497 was represented as an essentially anti-boyar, pro-dvoryanstvo plot (it was pointed out that the conspirators were mostly of humble origin); the execution of Ryapolovsky and the banishment of the Patrikeyevs in 1499 was looked upon as a triumph for the anti-boyar party headed by Sofia and her son; and the eventual disgrace of Yelena and Dmitry was held to be the ultimate defeat of the aristocratic opposition to the autocratic sovereign.<sup>27</sup>

Recent Soviet scholarship and the discovery of fresh material (notably the information on Vasily's flight to Vyaz'ma) has made it possible to appraise the events of 1497-1502 afresh. It must of course be stressed that, given the present paucity of sources, there is no complete and satisfying solution to the problem of the dynastic crisis and that all theories must necessarily remain conjectural. It is nevertheless possible to offer an interpretation of certain events, to suggest

<sup>24</sup> See *P.S.R.L.*, VIII, p. 242, for both events.

<sup>25</sup> See *P.S.R.L.*, XXIV, p. 215.

<sup>26</sup> See *P.S.R.L.*, VIII, p. 250.

<sup>27</sup> Such, broadly speaking, were the views of Karamzin, Solov'yov and Klyuchevsky.

certain solutions to certain aspects of the problem, which, while they may not always corroborate pre-conceived theories, will at least not conflict with such facts as can be reasonably established.

The conspiracy of 1497 has been variously interpreted by Soviet historians.<sup>28</sup> In most cases attention has been riveted on the conspirators themselves. S. B. Veselovsky was the first Soviet historian to point out that one of the main conspirators, V. E. Gusev, was not a *d'yak*, as had been almost generally assumed before, but a member of a distinguished and rich boyar family and that he and two others of the remaining five conspirators named had been connected either personally or through their close relatives with the courts of former appanage princes.<sup>29</sup> Cherepnin took up the theme, which had been barely developed by Veselovsky. In view of the links of the plotters and their families with the former *udel'nyye* princes, he came to the conclusion that the conspiracy of 1497 was a scheme 'to defend the interests of the feudal centres'—'a recrudescence of the feudal war of Vasily II'. As for Vasily himself, Cherepnin somewhat lamely concludes that 'it is hardly possible to admit any real community of interest between Vasily Ivanovich and Gusev's party'. The figure of Vasily 'was necessary to the plotters only to enable them to contest Ivan III's policy of crushing the independence of a number of feudal centres'. Sofia and Vasily, on their side, found the plotters 'useful for their struggle against Dmitry Ivanovich'. In other words, Sofia and Vasily were only interested in the narrow issue of the dynastic question; the broader political issues were the concern of Gusev and his party.<sup>30</sup>

Bazilevich develops Cherepnin's ideas still further. The plotters were connected with 'the appanage courts and their feudalistic separatist tendencies';<sup>31</sup> they were not representatives of the minor service nobility, but for the most part 'belonged by origin to princely-boyar families';<sup>32</sup> and among them were 'people in some degree connected with the Muscovite emigrés in Lithuania'.<sup>33</sup> The conspiracy was the result of dissatisfaction among the 'feudal aristocracy' and arose independently of the dynastic crisis. As for the differences of opinion between Sofia and Ivan III, Bazilevich casts further afield

<sup>28</sup> For a general historiographical survey, see Ya. S. Lur'e, 'Vopros ob ideologicheskikh dvizheniyakh kontsa XV—nachala XVI v. v nauchnoy literature' (*Trudy otdela drevnerusskoy literatury* (abbr. *T.O.D.R.L.*), XV, Moscow-Leningrad, 1958, pp. 131–52).

<sup>29</sup> See S. B. Veselovsky, 'Vladimir Gusev . . .', pp. 31–47. Veselovsky's conclusions are feeble: 'the affair of V. Gusev and his fellow-conspirators was distorted by the court party hostile to them . . . they were involved in the affair and executed because, owing to carelessness or careerism, they interfered in the family concern of the grand prince.' *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>30</sup> See Cherepnin, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 289–303.

<sup>31</sup> Bazilevich, *Vneshnyaya politika* . . ., p. 361.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 364.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 370.

than Cherepnin. The conflict did not arise because of the dynastic problem, but because of a difference in attitude to Lithuanian questions between Ivan and his wife. Basing his views on the slenderest of evidence—the ‘unpolitical’ tone of a letter written by Sofia to her daughter Yelena in Lithuania<sup>34</sup>—Bazilevich assumes that Ivan and Sofia failed to see eye to eye on the question of Russo-Lithuanian relations. However, in developing this same theme, he quite rightly points out that Yelena Stepanovna was ‘the natural opponent of Alexander, who himself was the enemy of her father Stephen’ [of Moldavia], and that the renewal of hostilities between Alexander and Stephen and Ivan’s intense interest in Moldavian affairs coincided with his breach with Sofia.<sup>35</sup> Lur’e, whose views are much the same as Cherepnin’s and Bazilevich’s in so far as he considers Gusev’s plot ‘a reactionary movement linked with the boyar-princely opposition’,<sup>36</sup> is primarily concerned with associating Sofia’s name with the interests of the ‘feudal’ aristocracy and demonstrating the proximity of the views of Yelena Stepanovna (and, of course, the Judaisers) and those of the autocrat. Gusev—that ‘representative of the new feudal oppositional bloc’<sup>37</sup>—and his friends were the enemies of autocracy; there is no question of any boyar support for Yelena and Dmitry at any time.<sup>38</sup>

In contrast to these views only two Soviet historians uphold the interpretation of Solov’yov and the ‘bourgeois’ historians by maintaining that Gusev and his party were enemies of the boyars and supporters of autocracy, and that Dmitry and Yelena were backed by the aristocratic nobility, notably the Ryapolovsky-Patrikeyev group. I. I. Smirnov, in his review of Bazilevich’s book on Ivan III’s foreign policy, criticises the standpoint of both Bazilevich and Veselovsky and attempts to show that Gusev’s group were all typical of ‘the untitled middle stratum of the feudal class’ which supported a growing centralised government. The plot of 1497 was an attempt by the ‘boyars’ sons’ and the *d’yaki* to alter the course of events, to remove Dmitry, whom ‘feudal princely circles’ were hoping to use in their nefarious climb to power, and to hand over authority to Vasily.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> In 1497 Sofia wrote to Yelena, the wife of Alexander of Lithuania, a motherly letter enquiring after her husband’s health and her pregnancy. At the same time Ivan III wrote his usual injunctions to maintain the orthodox faith, to request Alexander to build her a church and attach orthodox courtiers to her suite (*S.R.I.O.*, vol. 35, no. 49, pp. 239–42). ‘This absence of interest in the religious and political conditions of her daughter’s life—so vastly important in Ivan’s eyes—cannot [?] be explained by the intimate nature of a mother’s letter which left the husband to deal with all official affairs’. Bazilevich, *Vneshnyaya politika* . . . , p. 366.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 368–9.

<sup>36</sup> See Kazakova and Lur’e, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

<sup>37</sup> Ya. S. Lur’e, ‘Iz istorii politicheskoy bor’by pri Ivane III’ (*Uchonyye zapiski Leningradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, no. 80, 1941, p. 92).

<sup>38</sup> See Lur’e, *ibid.*, and ‘Pervyye ideologi . . .’.

<sup>39</sup> See I. I. Smirnov, *Voprosy istorii*, 1952, no. 11, pp. 139–44.

A. A. Zimin's views are close to those of Smirnov: associating Ryapolsky and the Patrikeyevs with the Yelena-Dmitry faction, he considers that the heretical court party was purely reactionary and that Dmitry was the 'protégé of the boyar heretical circle'.<sup>40</sup>

### III

The first task in assessing the events of 1497 must surely be to try to establish the initial incident, the prime causal force which set other actions in motion. Most important in this connection is the information that Stromilov told Vasily about Ivan's plans to make Dmitry grand prince. It may, of course, be argued, that this was simply the chronicler's own naïve motivation for the story which he wished to narrate or that the incident was related in order to throw the blame on the *d'yaki* and lessen the guilt of the future grand prince. But a careful reading of the text, which is convincingly factual and detailed, makes this seem unlikely, especially as the fragment in question, which dates from before Vasily's accession, is certainly less biased and more objective than the other abridged accounts of the affair. It would thus appear that the first move came from Ivan III, who decided to appoint his grandson heir. If we discount for a moment the supposition that Yelena's own political convictions were probably more congenial to Ivan than those of Sofia—a supposition based solely on the view that the Judaisers, or at any rate the Muscovite section of the sect, were themselves the champions of autocracy—we must look for another reason for Ivan's momentous decision.

The year 1497 was one of singular tension in south-east Europe. In June Ivan was informed by Alexander of Lithuania that a joint Turkish-Tartar attack on Poland and Lithuania was imminent. When, however, it became clear in Moscow that the vast Polish and Lithuanian armies massing to the north of the Moldavian frontier were not there to protect their own lands but to invade Moldavia on their way to the Black Sea coast, Ivan did all he could to avert what might well have turned out to be a disaster for his ally Stephen. In August P. G. Zabolotsky, one of Ivan's ablest diplomats, accompanied significantly enough by the brother of Yelena's chief supporter in Moscow, Ivan Volk Kuritsyn, set off for Alexander's headquarters in Lutsk with instructions at all costs to stop the Lithuanians from making war on Stephen.<sup>41</sup> He need have had no anxiety, for in October 1497 Stephen decisively defeated the Poles and the Lithuanians as their armies withdrew north; and Moldavia was saved from becoming a Jagiellonian province.

<sup>40</sup> See A. A. Zimin, 'O politicheskoy doktrine Iosifa Volotskogo', *T.O.D.R.L.*, vol. IX, 1953, p. 165.

<sup>41</sup> See *S.R.I.O.*, vol. 35, no. 48, pp. 236–8.

The fate of Moldavia was of the greatest importance to Ivan. The presence of an active ally on the banks of the Dniester, able to tie down large forces in Podolia, would considerably strengthen his own strategic position. It was essential, in view of the coming war with Lithuania, to ensure the friendship of Stephen. During the period preceding the Polish 'Black Sea' expedition of 1497 both the Poles and the Lithuanians on the one hand and the Muscovites on the other pressed Stephen to support their cause. Just before the expedition set out, Alexander of Lithuania sent two ambassadors to Suceava to conclude a treaty with Stephen and to urge him to join the Jagiellons in their crusade against the Turks.<sup>42</sup> Ivan, who at this time was busy trying to form an alliance with the Turks, was also engaged in diplomatic exchanges with Stephen. Although we know nothing of the nature of these exchanges, we must assume that the grand prince was attempting to dissuade Stephen from joining Jan Olbracht and Alexander in any venture directed against the Turks or the Tartars. We know that some time before November 1497, in all probability in August, Ivan Oshcherin, whom a year previously Ivan had sent to Moldavia, arrived back in Moscow together with a Moldavian envoy.<sup>43</sup> It seems not improbable that Oshcherin brought back with him the welcome information that Stephen, in the event of Polish-Lithuanian troops marching through his country, had decided to declare himself a vassal of the sultan and to resist the Jagiellons. A condition may well have been that Ivan, in recompense for such behaviour on the part of his ally, should reward him by proclaiming their mutual grandson heir to the throne. There was little else he could do to show his appreciation of Stephen's decision, short of attacking Lithuania; and the time had not yet come for that.

It may thus be argued that Ivan had ample reason to appoint Dmitry grand prince of Vladimir and Moscow; it was a blatant demonstration of the grand prince's approval of the attitude of Stephen to the Jagiellons. It may well, too, have been intended at home as a demonstration of his disapproval of Sofia's boyar sympathies and connections. The confidential information concerning Ivan's plans which was passed to Vasily by Stromilov sparked off the rebellion. Such a sacrifice of her son, who after his appointment to

<sup>42</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 233.

<sup>43</sup> See *S.R.I.O.*, vol. 41, p. 240. The dating is hard to establish. On 2 November 1497 Ivan sent a party to the Crimea with a message complaining that his ambassador Oshcherin, 'who has now arrived in Moscow', had been plundered on his journey. The chronicler states that Oshcherin was sent to Moldavia in June 1496, and returned in 'August' with the Moldavian ambassador Ivan Pitar, having been plundered on the way back. Although this is not actually stated, it must have been August 1497. Three months were barely sufficient for the journey from Moscow to Suceava and back. See *P.S.R.L.*, VIII, pp. 232-3.



Tver' in 1490 must have seemed assured of the title, could scarcely have failed to enrage Sofia. Revolt was the only form of protest and action open to her. By acquiescing in Dmitry's appointment she would have ruined the chances of her eldest son and, as her ecclesiastical advisers no doubt warned her, would have imperilled orthodoxy itself.

Thanks to her connections with the former appanage principality of Vereya—and perhaps too with the courts of Ivan's brothers before their liquidation—Sofia was assured of support from certain elements of the population. She could presumably count on local support in Beloozero, chosen by the conspirators as one of the centres of rebellion; her links with this district, formerly part of the appanage of the princes of Vereya, date from as far back as 1480 when she fled there in so disgraceful a manner. If we also consider the background and family connections of the conspirators themselves, it will be seen that many of them were closely linked with the courts of the former appanage princes or themselves had aristocratic family connections. Vladimir Gusev, for example, was a member of the distinguished boyar family of Dobrynsky. His father, Yelizar Vasil'evich Gusev, had served in the courts of two appanage princes—Ivan Andreyevich of Mozhaysk (brother of Mikhail of Vereya and enemy of Vasily II) and Ivan III's brother, Andrey the Younger, the bulk of whose patrimony consisted of the plotters' second centre of rebellion—Vologda.<sup>44</sup> Afanasy Yeropkin (Ropchenok), 'the second forerunner of Satan', was the descendant of a family of minor Smolensk princelings, who had emigrated to Moscow in the beginning of the 15th century and had since had links with various appanage princes within the Muscovite state, including those of Volotsk.<sup>45</sup> Stromilov's grandfather had betrayed Vasily II during the civil war and, like Gusev's father, had entered the service of Prince Ivan Andreyevich of Mozhaysk. Like Yeropkin, Shchavey Skryabin-Travin was also the descendant of petty Smolensk princes. Prince Ivan Ivanovich Khrul' Paletsky, the only member of the conspiracy to have retained his title, belonged to the aristocratic and distinguished family of the princes of Starodub (on the Klyaz'ma), two more of whose members,

<sup>44</sup> See Veselovsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 33–43; Cherepnin, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 293–4; Bazilevich, *Vneshnyaya politika* . . . , p. 363. On the slenderest of evidence Cherepnin puts forward the view that Vladimir Gusev was connected with Andrey the Elder of Uglich. He also claims that Vladimir's brother Yushko, who fled to Lithuania in 1492, was connected with Andrey's court; he argues that his flight 'was evidently [!] linked with the arrest of Andrey', but he gives no evidence to support his claim. Bazilevich thinks that Yushko's flight was linked with the arrival in Moscow of the Lithuanian ambassadors Stanislav Glebovich and Ivan Vladychko (November 1492). (See Bazilevich, *op. cit.*, p. 393, note 2.) A more likely explanation is that Yushko was involved in the conspiracy of Lukomsky, who, at the same time, was executed for plotting to murder Ivan III. See *P.S.R.L.*, VIII, p. 225, XII, p. 234.

<sup>45</sup> See Veselovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 43; Cherepnin, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 295; Bazilevich, *op. cit.*, p. 362.

Ryapolovsky and Romodanovsky, were themselves shortly to fall foul of the grand prince.<sup>46</sup>

Even if these investigations into the antecedents of the plotters do not prove conclusively that Gusev and his party were the partisans of separatism and the opponents of the grand prince's policy of centralisation, they at least show that these men were in no way typical of what Smirnov calls 'the untitled middle stratum of the feudal class' which supported a centralised state, typical 'boyars' sons' bitterly opposed to 'appanage princely circles'. There is nothing, apart from Stromilov's title of *d'yak vvedennyi*, which implied membership of the state council, and the general appellation 'boyars' sons', to show that the conspirators belonged to the new social class of the minor service nobility which, at a later date, was to prove the mainstay of autocracy. If anything, it is easier to envisage these men as the opponents of a system which had virtually destroyed the old political way of life enjoyed and fought for by their fathers. If it is true that Sofia herself sympathised with the separatist views held by her brothers-in-law and the princes of Vereya, these were precisely the sort of men to support her in her conflict with the grand prince.

The most likely chain of events in 1497 therefore appears to have been as follows: the crisis was started by Ivan's decision to appoint Dmitry as grand prince. This was primarily a political move designed to please Stephen of Moldavia and perhaps even to reward him in the most adequate and demonstrative way possible for the vital part which he was playing in the affairs of south-east Europe. This act led to Sofia's extreme displeasure and forced her hand. Her previous connections with Vereya and Beloozero led her to seek the support of men whose sympathies lay with the fast-crumbling appanage system and who opposed the grand prince's policy of combating separatism. A rebellion was planned as the only means of resisting the grand prince or, at the worst, of forcing him to reconsider his decision. There may, of course, have been other reasons, apart from internal politics and the dynastic question, which broadened the breach between the grand prince and Sofia—for example, the question of the forthcoming war with Lithuania. Was Sofia prepared to play her part in what promised to be a conflict for the purity of the orthodox faith, a crusade against the Roman church? Did she approve of the function which Ivan requested their daughter to fulfil in Vilna? Such questions unfortunately must remain hypothetical. All that can be assumed from the available evidence is that Sofia was sufficiently goaded by Stromilov's secret information to plan rebellion with others whose

<sup>46</sup> See Veselovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 44. Nothing is known of Poyarok. His brother, Ivan Runo, had a fairly distinguished career as *vovoda*, and for some reason or other was disgraced about 1483. (*Ibid.*, pp. 44-5).

views she shared. There is no reason to suppose that Sofia 'made use of' the rebels in order to achieve her ends or that the rebels made use of Sofia and her son as figureheads for their insurrection. Such a view is straining probability too far.

While it is relatively easy to find a reasonable explanation for the first phase of the crisis, it is extremely difficult satisfactorily to interpret the events of 1499. As has already been pointed out, the 19th-century historians saw in the removal of Ryapolovsky and the Patrikeyevs a blow for the boyars who were represented at court by Yelena and Dmitry and a gratification of the 'anti-boyar' group headed by Vasily and Sofia. In the eyes of Solov'yov, the 'treachery' of the Patrikeyevs and Ryapolovsky 'consisted of their actions against Sofia and her son and in favour of Yelena and Dmitry'.<sup>47</sup> The Soviet historians who consider that Sofia's sympathies lay with the aristocracy are at pains to disassociate the elimination of the boyars as far as possible from the dynastic question: the only way to explain away the coincidence of the events of January and March 1499 was either to show that the Patrikeyevs and Ryapolovsky were not entirely representative of the *boyarstvo* in general and were therefore not to be identified with Sofia and Vasily, whose triumph, or partial triumph, followed closely upon their removal; or to suggest that the boyars concerned were removed for reasons in no way connected with the Sofia-Yelena conflict.

Bazilevich considers that the arrest of the boyars had nothing to do with the dynastic conflict. It was a question of disagreement on foreign policy. Ryapolovsky and the two Patrikeyevs, he points out, were intimately connected with Russo-Lithuanian relations, in particular with the conclusion of the peace of 1494 and the marriage of Yelena and Alexander in 1495; Romodanovsky, arrested in April 1499, was also connected with the royal wedding. Most important, Ivan Yur'evich Patrikeyev was a man who enjoyed the confidence of the Lithuanians—a fact demonstrated, in Bazilevich's opinion, by his correspondence with Jan Zabrzeziński and Nicholas Radziwiłł in 1492.<sup>48</sup> In view of this evidence and in view of the warning which Ivan gave his ambassadors to Vilna in 1503

not to act with domineering arrogance (*vysokoumnichat'*) like Prince Ryapolovsky and Prince Vasily Ivanovich [Patrikeyev],<sup>49</sup>

Bazilevich comes to the conclusion that the punished princes were 'convinced partisans of reconciliation and friendship with Lithuania'

<sup>47</sup> See S. M. Solov'yov, *Istoriya Rossii*, 'Obshchestvennaya Pol'za', ed., vol. 5, ch. 2, col. 1410. Cf. V. O. Klyuchevsky, *Kurs russkoy istorii* (8 vols., Moscow, 1956–9, vol. II, p. 159).

<sup>48</sup> See *S.R.I.O.*, vol. 35, nos. 17 and 18.

<sup>49</sup> *S.R.I.O.*, vol. 35, p. 428.

and that 'in them Ivan III met opposition to his plans for the armed conflict with the Lithuanian sovereign'.<sup>50</sup> It is an attractive theory, but unfortunately somewhat hard to corroborate. The boyars concerned were, it is true, closely connected with Russo-Lithuanian affairs. But surely no conclusions concerning I. Yu. Patrikeyev's 'conciliatory tendencies' can be drawn from the fact that Zabrzeziński and Radziwiłł chose him to correspond with in 1492: he was selected by the Lithuanians, after all, because he was senior boyar of Moscow and as such most likely to influence his master; his written answer to Zabrzeziński was obviously dictated by Ivan III;<sup>51</sup> and his colleague, Yakov Zakhar'in, to whom Zabrzeziński and Radziwiłł also addressed themselves, not only survived the purge of 1499, but lived to carry on an identical correspondence—again with Zabrzeziński—in 1501.<sup>52</sup> As for Ivan's reference in 1503 to the behaviour of Ryapolovsky and V. I. Patrikeyev, this has clearly nothing to do with their 'treachery' or the reason for their punishment. Immediately before the words quoted by Bazilevich, Ivan instructed his envoys not to drink too much and not to dishonour their sovereign. The 'arrogance' mentioned by Ivan is more likely to refer to their behaviour on some particular occasion than to 'a serious divergence of views on policy'. Besides, no mention is made of Patrikeyev's father, whose guilt was presumably the same as his son's; and it is hardly likely that V. I. Patrikeyev, had he committed some grave political indiscretion during his last recorded mission to Lithuania in 1494, would have been put in command of the second expeditionary force to Finland in the winter of 1495-6.<sup>53</sup> As for Vasily's appointment as grand prince of Novgorod and Pskov in March 1499, Bazilevich considers this to have been the result of Sofia's willingness to fall in with Ivan's plans as regards Russo-Lithuanian relations:

evidently Sofia's reconciliation with the grand prince was achieved at the cost of her full submission to her husband in questions of Muscovite-Lithuanian relations.<sup>54</sup>

At the same time the appointment, Bazilevich thinks, was a gesture intended to prevent the Lithuanians from interpreting Ivan's quarrels with his wife and son as a sign of internal weakness.<sup>55</sup>

Cherepnin also considers that the execution of Ryapolovsky and the disgrace of the Patrikeyevs were closely linked with the beginning

<sup>50</sup> See Bazilevich, *Vneshnyaya politika* . . . , p. 374.

<sup>51</sup> Much of the wording of his note of 15 November 1492 to Zabrzeziński is identical with the message Zakhar'in was told by Ivan to transmit to Zabrzeziński earlier in the year. See *S.R.I.O.*, vol. 35, pp. 78-9, 70.

<sup>52</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 313-14.

<sup>53</sup> See *P.S.R.L.*, VIII, p. 231. Note also that Ryapolovsky led an expedition to **Kazan** in 1496 (*ibid.*, p. 231).

<sup>54</sup> Bazilevich, *Vneshnyaya politika* . . . , p. 375.

<sup>55</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 375.

of the war and that Patrikeyev senior was an 'advocate of Russo-Lithuanian rapprochement'. To substantiate his arguments Cherepnin mentions the correspondence with Zabrzeziński. He also attempts to link the events of 1499 with Russo-Moldavian relations:

the disgrace of Dmitry and Yelena Stepanovna was caused by the unwillingness of Yelena's father to enter the war on the side of Ivan III against Lithuania. Thus [!] the Patrikeyevs belonged to the party of Yelena Stepanovna which had declared against war with Lithuania.<sup>56</sup>

As, however, there could have been no indication of Stephen's 'unwillingness to enter the war' as early as January 1499 (Ivan first heard of Alexander's treaty with Stephen in August 1499<sup>57</sup>; before that he had no reason to suspect Stephen's friendship), and as the news of Vasily's appointment, misinterpreted perhaps, may well have contributed to Stephen's strange *volte face*,<sup>58</sup> little attention should be paid to Cherepnin's somewhat extravagant arguments. Indeed, there is no evidence and no justification whatsoever for his claim that the Yelena-Dmitry faction was opposed to the war. Cherepnin, however, goes still further and advances yet another, still more anachronistic, explanation for the purge. Both the Patrikeyevs and Ryapolovsky, he points out, were closely connected with the courts of Vasily II and Ivan III; in all their activities they had always shown themselves close adherents of the anti-separatist policy of the grand prince; they belonged to 'that section of the . . . Muscovite *boyarstvo* which . . . fought on the side of the grand princely power against the opposition coming from individual feudal centres'.<sup>59</sup> As the opponents of 'feudal separatism' they objected, so Cherepnin argues, to the support given by the grand prince to 'Russian émigré princes who came from the milieu of the enemies of the Muscovite grand princely power'.<sup>60</sup> Ryapolovsky and the Patrikeyevs may well have sympathised with Ivan in his political struggle against the old appanage system. But surely it is going too far to assume that the punishment of the boyars was 'in some way conditioned by the defection to Moscow of the descendants of those appanage princes who had waged feudal war against the Muscovite princes [?] in the days of Vasily II'.<sup>61</sup> In other words, the Patrikeyevs and Ryapolovsky were removed because they objected to the Muscovite government's willingness to accept the

<sup>56</sup> Cherepnin, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 315-16.

<sup>57</sup> See *S.R.I.O.*, vol. 35, p. 281.

<sup>58</sup> The Lithuanian-Moldavian treaty must have been concluded shortly before June 1499 (the credentials of Alexander's ambassador, who gave the news of it to Ivan, were signed on 5 June 1499—*S.R.I.O.*, vol. 35, p. 280). The main reason, of course, for the treaty was Turkish aggression. According to Alexander, no sooner had he dismissed Stephen's ambassador than news came that the Turks were sending forces against Stephen (*ibid.*, p. 281).

<sup>59</sup> Cherepnin, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 314.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 315.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 315.

service of Vasily Ivanovich Shemyachich and Semyon Ivanovich Mozhaysky, the only two defectors who fit Cherepnin's description. The absurdity of this theory becomes evident when we consider that Shemyachich and Mozhaysky transferred their allegiance to Moscow no less than fifteen months after the arrest of the boyars.<sup>62</sup> It is also hard to accept Cherepnin's explanation of Vasily's appointment as grand prince of Novgorod and Pskov as a step 'to strengthen the western frontiers of the Russian state in the event of the impending war with Lithuania'.<sup>63</sup>

Lur'e, unfortunately, has so far paid little attention to the question of the removal of the boyars. Without committing himself, he states that 'the disgrace of Ryapolovsky and the Patrikeyevs . . . was linked with questions of foreign policy',<sup>64</sup> and he rejects the view that the boyars were connected with the Yelena-Dmitry faction. Kuritsyn's links with Ryapolovsky and the Patrikeyevs he considers 'doubtful and unproved'. At the same time he points out that there is no evidence to show that the boyars concerned were in any way hostile to Vasily. A. A. Zimin and I. I. Smirnov on the other hand both consider that the boyars, 'the very top of the feudal aristocracy',<sup>65</sup> supported Yelena and Dmitry; their views are based mainly on the unreliable evidence of the *Stepennaya kniga*, which links the punishment of the boyars with the beginning of Ivan's 'disregard' for his grandson.

It is impossible to come to any definite conclusion about the events of 1499. The best that can be done is to examine the arguments for and against the allegiance of the victims to this or that particular 'party' and attempt to decide whether or not the purge had any connection with either the dynastic question, or foreign affairs, or internal policy.

At first sight the evidence would appear to be overwhelmingly in favour of the thesis that the boyars in question were the supporters of Yelena and Dmitry and belonged to their faction. First there is the chronological order and the close proximity in which the events of 1498-9 are related in the chronicles; this would lead to the view that the arrests, sandwiched between the coronation of Dmitry and the 'pardoning' of Vasily, were connected with both events and that Ivan's displeasure with his grandson was first manifested in January 1499 when the boyars were arrested. Secondly, there is the evidence

<sup>62</sup> They defected in April 1500, according to the chronicle (*P.S.R.L.*, VIII, p. 238). As no mention was made of them in the discussions with the Lithuanian ambassadors on 23 and 24 April 1500 (see *S.R.I.O.*, vol. 35, no. 64), they probably defected in the last week of the month.

<sup>63</sup> Cherepnin, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 315. No mention is made by Cherepnin of Romodanovsky's arrest.

<sup>64</sup> Kazakova and Lur'e, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

<sup>65</sup> See I. I. Smirnov, *Voprosy istorii*, no. 11, p. 143. For Zimin's views, see *O politicheskoy doktrine Iosifa* . . .



of the *Stepennaya kniga*, whose author was at pains to have his readers believe that the 'treacherous' boyars (their guilt is described as *kramola*—dissension, rebellion, or treason) were closely connected with Dmitry and that their fate and his fate were closely linked. Finally there are the ties between the punished boyars and Yelena's fellow-heretic and supporter, Fyodor Kuritsyn.<sup>66</sup> In dealing with Russo-Lithuanian affairs, I. Yu. Patrikeyev, as senior member of the state council, and Kuritsyn, as one of Ivan's most experienced specialists on foreign affairs, worked closely together, as can be seen from the records of the diplomatic exchanges between Moscow and Vilna.<sup>67</sup> In the spring of 1494 Fyodor Kuritsyn was attached to the mission headed by V. I. Patrikeyev and S. I. Ryapolovsky which went to Vilna to complete the formalities of the peace treaty and to negotiate certain details of the marriage between Alexander and Yelena Ivanovna.<sup>68</sup> Whatever his personal relationship with them, it cannot be denied that Kuritsyn was closely connected professionally with the two Patrikeyevs and with Ryapolovsky.

None of these points, however, can be called irrefutable proof that Ryapolovsky and the Patrikeyevs supported Yelena and Dmitry in the dynastic conflict. It would be dangerous to argue that because one incident preceded another it necessarily led to or was connected with it. The worthlessness of the *Stepennaya kniga* as a source for the events of Ivan III's reign has already been pointed out, while the fact that Kuritsyn and the boyars happened to be professional colleagues does not necessarily make them political partners; indeed, it might be pointed out that Gusev, one of the ringleaders of the 1497 conspiracy, was himself a member of Yelena Ivanovna's escort to Vilna in 1495 of which S. I. Ryapolovsky was in charge.<sup>69</sup> If it could be shown that Yelena and Dmitry represented the 'progressive' party at court, the party which supported autocracy and opposed separatism, then the Patrikeyevs, in so far as they can be called 'anti-separatists', might well be regarded as their allies. It is true, as Cherepnin has convincingly shown, that the Patrikeyevs and Ryapolovsky worked closely with the grand princely authority in its dealings with the appanage princes both under Ivan III and during Vasily

<sup>66</sup> Cherepnin considers that he may have had a part in preparing the text of the *Sudebnik* in 1497 together with the Patrikeyevs. See Cherepnin, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 308–14.

<sup>67</sup> Both, for instance, were concerned with the reception and handling of the Lithuanian envoys in June–July 1493 (see *S.R.I.O.*, vol. 35, no. 22). In January 1494 V. I. Patrikeyev, S. I. Ryapolovsky and F. Kuritsyn were instructed to hand the Lithuanian envoys Ivan's reply to them (*ibid.*, no. 24). It is interesting to note that in July 1497 both Patrikeyevs and Fyodor Kuritsyn witnessed a deed of exchange (*menovnaya gramota*) issued by Ivan III to his nephews Ivan and Fyodor Borisovich of Volotsk, the last surviving appanage princes in the Muscovite state (see *Dukhovnyye i dogovornyye gramoty velikikh i udel'nikh knyazey XIV–XVI vv.* (abbr. *D.D.G.*), A.N. S.S.S.R., 1950, p. 344).

<sup>68</sup> See *S.R.I.O.*, vol. 35, no. 25.

<sup>69</sup> See *ibid.*, no. 31.

II's reign.<sup>70</sup> But as they were the senior advisers of the grand prince it is hard to say whether their co-operation with him in the struggle against the remnants of the appanage system necessarily means that they were the ideological upholders of the principles of undivided autocratic rule and the opponents of 'feudal separatism'.

On the face of it the evidence seems to show that, if anything, the punished boyars were in sympathy with the opposition headed by Sofia and Vasily. In the first place there is the irrefutable fact that when Vasily Ivanovich became grand prince, he not only forgave Vassian (as Vasily Patrikeyev was known after his profession) but allowed him to live in Moscow where he exercised an extraordinary influence over the sovereign.<sup>71</sup> Secondly it must be remembered that Metropolitan Simon supported the Patrikeyevs: thanks to his intercession in 1499 they were saved from execution. Simon himself, who later appeared as the staunch supporter of Joseph of Volokolamsk and the opponent of the heretics, can only have been on the side of Vasily and Sofia in the dynastic conflict. Indeed, it may well be that the church council under Simon, which was consulted by Ivan in 1497, saved their lives at the time. It also looks as if the metropolitan's sympathies lay with the 'separatists'. At any rate he is known to have disapproved sufficiently strongly of Ivan III's treatment of his brother, Andrey of Uglich, to have demonstratively rebuked him in public. According to the Tipografskiy chronicle, he imposed penance on the grand prince for his responsibility for Andrey's death.<sup>72</sup> Lastly there is the question of the arrest of Vasily Vasil'evich Romodanovsky which took place in April 1499. It may, of course, have had no connection with the arrest of the Patrikeyevs and Ryapolovsky three months earlier; but this seems unlikely, in view of the fact that in his diplomatic activity he was a close colleague<sup>73</sup> of theirs and was also a member of the same branch of the Ryurikovichi as Ryapolovsky, whose father, Ivan Andreyevich Starodubsky-Ryapolovsky, was the

<sup>70</sup> See Cherepnin, *op. cit.*, pp. 307-8, 314-15. Of most interest is the part played by the boyars in Ivan III's dealings with his brothers. In 1481 I. Yu. Patrikeyev witnessed Andrey the Younger's will, in which all the latter's estates were transferred to Ivan III (see *D.D.G.*, p. 277). In 1491 I. Yu. Patrikeyev's two sons, Vasily and Ivan Mynin, were sent to arrest the children of Andrey the Elder (see *U.L.*, p. 99). Ryapolovsky himself was entrusted with the arrest of Andrey. The chronicler of Ustyug, the only one to report the incident in detail, describes how Ryapolovsky wept when he told Andrey the news. However, it must be borne in mind that the whole passage (*U.L.*, pp. 98-9) shows considerable sympathy for Andrey; Ryapolovsky's tears were probably invented to heighten the pathos. The Ustyug version of the incident, as too prejudiced in favour of Andrey, must have been rejected by the other, more 'official', chronicles.

<sup>71</sup> One of Vassian's associates later described him as 'a great favourite (*velikoy vremennoy chelovek*), close to the grand prince'. See 'Preniya Daniila . . . so inokom Maksimom Svyatogortsem,' (*Chteniya obshchestva istorii i drevnostey rossiyskikh*, 1847, 7).

<sup>72</sup> See *P.S.R.L.*, XXIV, p. 214; Kazakova and Lur'e, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

<sup>73</sup> In February 1495 he was sent with his wife to Vilna to replace S. I. Ryapolovsky, who had accompanied Yelena from Moscow, and to assist Yelena in her secret correspondence with Ivan (see *S.R.I.O.*, vol. 35, no. 32). In 1498 he was sent off again on a mission to Alexander and Yelena (see *ibid.*, no. 53).

brother of Romodanovsky's grandfather, Fyodor Andreyevich Starodubsky. If it is assumed that Romodanovsky was arrested for the same reason as the other boyars, we can point to still closer connections between the 'boyar group' as a whole and the party, if such it was, headed by Sofia and Vasily. For before he engaged on his diplomatic activities V. V. Romodanovsky had been senior boyar at the appanage court of Prince Mikhail Andreyevich of Vereya, who mentioned him several times in his will.<sup>74</sup> This does not prove that the 'boyar group' had pro-appanage, pro-separatist tendencies—Cherepnin has produced equally convincing evidence to show that the opposite was true—but it at least shows some link between Sofia, who is known to have been closely associated with Vereya, and one of the boyars involved in the events of 1499.

An examination of all the available evidence leads to the conclusion that there is nothing to prove that the arrest of the boyars was directly connected with the dynastic crisis. Still less can it be said that questions of foreign policy were involved—that the Patrikeyevs or Ryapolovsky were opposed to Ivan's plans for waging war on Lithuania or that they objected to the government's attitude to would-be defectors. All that can be said is that most of the available evidence indicates that the political inclinations of the boyars coincided with those of Sofia and Vasily.

The removal of Ryapolovsky, the three Patrikeyevs, Romodanovsky and probably others as well was a blow to the faction headed by Sofia and her son, a blow which the grand prince tried to soften by 'pardoning' Vasily and granting him the grand principality of Novgorod and Pskov. Sofia and Vasily were not satisfied with this concession. Nor can they have been gratified by the news that later in the same year Ivan 'seized for himself in Novgorod the Great lands belonging to the archbishop and the monasteries and distributed them as fiefs to his 'boyars' sons'';<sup>75</sup> although this was done 'with the blessing of Metropolitan Simon', it must have been interpreted if not as a triumph for the heretical party, at least as a defeat for Archbishop Gennady and Joseph of Volokolamsk and, indirectly, for Sofia and Vasily.

The result of all these events, as has already been shown, was Vasily's flight in 1500. Dissatisfied with the treatment which he and his mother and their adherents were receiving from the grand prince, he decided to force Ivan's hand in the most drastic manner possible. His flight had the desired effect. Unable to risk another rebellion like that of his brothers in 1480 and fearful of the consequences if Vasily fell among the still uncommitted west Russian princes, Ivan recalled his son. The return of Vasily meant the down-

<sup>74</sup> See *D.D.G.*, no. 80.

<sup>75</sup> *P.S.R.L.*, XII, p. 249.

fall of Yelena and Dmitry. No further explanation need be sought of Ivan's decision to withdraw his support from his daughter-in-law, his grandson, and the heretical faction: he was forced into this by circumstances and by the uncompromising behaviour of his son. The decision which he took cannot have been easy. Yet for Ivan there was one crumb of comfort: he could now abandon Yelena without fear of disrupting the carefully planned alliance with her father, Stephen of Moldavia. For the alliance was virtually dead. During the whole of the first year of the Russo-Lithuanian war Stephen had not attacked Poland and Lithuania, as Ivan had hoped, but had spent his time vainly attempting to stop both Ivan III and Mengli Girey of the Crimea from fighting his newly-found ally, Alexander of Lithuania. Ironically enough, it was not until after Ivan finally decided to arrest Yelena and Dmitry that Stephen changed his tactics, invaded south-east Poland and seized the province of Pokucie to the great embarrassment of King Alexander.